Remarks

Each of the independent claims has been amended to clarify that a contact can be received at any one of said contact centers and it is the contact center receiving the contact that ultimately makes the routing decision. In particular, independent claim 1 has been amended to incorporate the subject matter of claim 5 which is now cancelled, wherein said contact can be received at any of said contact centers and the contact center receiving the contact is thereafter designated as the source contact center with respect to the received contact. This clarifies the distributed nature of the method and system as claimed and as previously argued by the applicant. It also patentably distinguishes the present invention over Charalambous (US5530744).

Charalambous discloses a system which routes a new call to a next available agent at one of a number of sites (contact centers) based on a predicted status of each site for the new call arrival. The predicted status is based on near real time status and performance data gathered from each site periodically. The Examiner argues that this disclosure anticipates the feature of the invention of, on receiving a new contact (e.g. call), sending a reservation request from a source contact center to all other contact centers including itself at the same time in order to determine which agent (of all agents in all the contact centers) to route the call to. This is not a correct characterization of what Charalambous discloses.

There are several differences between what is claimed and this newly cited reference. In the present case, a new contact is received at a (source) contact center. In other words, the call could be received at any contact center in the system, the designation of "source" merely being used to relate the contact as being received at one of said contact centers relative to the others. In Charalambous, all calls are processed for routing to a next available agent by a centralized Customer

Routing Point which also receives the near real time periodic updates of the status of the various contact sites for use in the routing decision. In the present case, real time data is employed, i.e. data received in response to the reservation request rather than periodically received near real time data. In the present case, the contact center receiving a new contact issues a reservation request to all contact centers including itself. There is no such mechanism involved in the system of taught by Charalambous. The centralized CRP system of Charalambous periodically gathers updates of the statuses of the various contact sites for use in the routing decision. This cannot be construed as the (real time) sending of a reservation request in respect of a received contact to all of the other contact centers. The near real time information as taught by Charalambous, while used in the routing decision, is not solicited in real time in response to a received call. In the system of Charalambous, the period updates will still be received at the centralized CRP system irrespective of whether any contacts have been received or not.

A disadvantage of the centralized CRP system of Charalambous is that, if a fault occurs in this centralized system, the load balancing system collapses. Whereas, in the present invention, since any contact center can issue a reservation request to all others on receiving a new call, the load balancing is effectively a distributed system that can operate even if one or more of the contact centers becomes non-operational for a time.

In view of the foregoing, favorable consideration of the claims as amended is respectfully requested.

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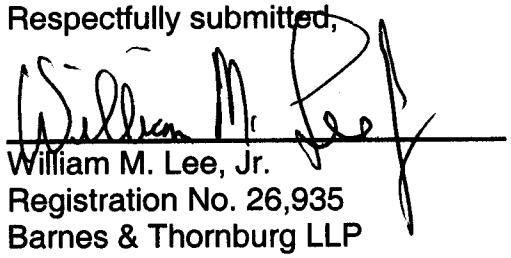
Respectfully submitted,



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